

Water is everything: How rural water points are changing lives in Burkina Faso



Islamic Development Bank Group

Water is the basis of life. And in Africa's Sahel region, the lack of safe drinking water is one of the biggest challenges. The time spent collecting water, mostly by women and children, and especially the health problems caused by contaminated supplies, cause significant problems for rural communities.

This story shows how one project funded by the Islamic Development Bank (ISDB) has made huge improvements to the daily lives of up to a hundred thousand people in Kenedougou Province, Burkina Faso. And, importantly, it has helped them to realize a basic human right – the right to clean water.

The Government of Burkina Faso's strategic agenda states that it is "the right of every citizen to access potable water" and that every person should be able to get at least 20 litres of clean water every day. In line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs),

the government is striving to achieve a target of 76 per cent of the rural population having this right by the end of 2015.

Children during school holidays using a Vegnet pedal pump. These can pump water from a depth of up to 80 metres.



“Water is everything. And we thank you, who helped us to secure a safe supply for us all.”

— Mr Ahmed Lassina Konaté, President of Bandougou village water users' association

But Burkina Faso has many problems with its rural water supply. Where groundwater is available, it is traditionally drawn up in buckets from open wells. These are several metres deep and anything can fall into them, making the water unsafe to drink. And even rains aren't a guarantee of clean water: the streams and temporary ponds that form are shared with livestock, and excrement, waste and other pollutants contaminate the supply. These problems make people sick: diarrhoea and other water-borne diseases are commonplace and sometimes fatal, especially for children. These preventable illnesses limit the development of the communities concerned – and water points offer a solution.

In 1999, the government asked IsDB to help finance a project to construct and repair rural water points. This was within the framework of a larger five-year Special Cooperation Programme of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Permanent Inter-state Committee for Drought

Control in the Sahel (CILSS), and IsDB. This US\$ 150 million programme aimed to overcome the drought-related obstacles hampering socio-economic development, and IsDB participated by way of a US\$20 million indicative contribution (concessional loan). IsDB disbursed US\$7.6 million for projects in three countries – Burkina Faso (US\$2.54 million for this project), Niger and Senegal – for water resources management, food security, desertification control and crop protection. The government provided 15.5 per cent of the total project cost.

At the request of the Burkina Faso Government, the IsDB project specifically targeted Kenedougou, the westernmost province of Burkina Faso. Access to drinking water here was lower than the national average (64% in 2014), so the project's aim was “to substantially help the rural populations of Kenedougou by improving their access to potable water”.



What is a water point?

A water point is more than just a well or borehole. It is a complete installation that ensures easy, continual access to clean water. In this project, these comprised a borehole, a manual water pump and a concrete superstructure that facilitates extraction and minimizes waste. The borehole head is closed so no dirty water can seep in. Any spillage is directed to a trough where livestock can drink, and an overflow leads to a soakaway.

A typical manual water pump, one of four models installed in Kenedougou.

Any spilled water is channelled into a trough for livestock or for watering vegetable gardens. Excess goes into a soakaway, and which ensures that it does not contaminate the supply.



More than expected

The project was expected to start in 2002 and end in 2005, but was eventually completed in 2007. The project originally planned to construct 200 new water points in Kenedougou, acquire and install 275 pumps, and repair 75 old boreholes. However, by the end of the project,



Access to clean water is a basic human right, and one that a hundred thousand people now have, thanks to this project.

211 new water points had been constructed, 81 had been repaired, and 277 new pumps had been installed – all without exceeding the project budget. How was this possible?

Aquifers were often less than the predicted 80 metres (m) deep, so drilling costs were cheaper. Also, changes in the exchange rate between the US dollar and the West African (CFA) franc from the year of the proposal until completion were favourable; this meant more local currency was available.

During this time, Kenedougou's population also increased in the target areas from 85,000 to 100,000. But the additional boreholes, and an increase in output from the planned 1.7 million litres of water per day to 2 million litres, meant there was enough water to meet the extra demand. Access to potable water in the project area increased from 38 per cent to 51 per cent as a result of the new water points.

“**For a country to develop, you must invest in the people; for people to develop, they first need clean water and sanitation.**

— Mrs Colette Tienrebeogo, Potable Water Supply Service, Hauts Bassins Regional Directorate

Kenedougou water points by numbers...

US\$2.90 million Total project cost

US\$2.54 million IsDB's contribution

211 New boreholes drilled, up to 80 m deep

81 Old boreholes repaired and rehabilitated

277 New water pumps installed

An increase of **2 million** litres of drinking water per day

100,000 People benefiting from access to safe, clean drinking water

Healthy and happy

The project's most important impact was on people's health. But the rate at which this was felt depended on how quickly communities adopted hygienic practices regarding water transport and storage.

A more immediate benefit was saving time, particularly for women and children, who usually collect water for the household and their animals. With water points nearby, women have more time for other duties, such as childcare. But they can also contribute to household nutrition through home gardens, and even earn an income if surpluses can be sold.

The water points created many other long-term and sustainable economic benefits, including the creation of 292 permanent jobs. This army of trained technicians service and repair the pumps. These entrepreneurs, many of whom are young, respond quickly to calls for assistance and come equipped with the tools and spare parts they may need. Periodic checks and general maintenance are carried out by 15 technicians from the government's General Directorate for Water Resources. The water points have also generated several small business activities. All this helps to reduce the number of people moving to cities for work.

Improved access to **safe water** has upgraded the quality of life for people.



Keep containers clean and closed!

This message was repeated time and again, before and after the water points were installed, as part of an education and awareness-raising scheme. At first, some people brought dirty buckets, or put the water into an open container at home, sometimes one shared with animals. What came out of the ground as clean water was contaminated through poor hygiene.

Extension workers, social workers and others with community experience were trained in hygienic principles and sent around while the water points were being constructed. Thanks to this effort, it didn't take long for the message to get through. Now, the metal bowls that come to the water points are sparkling.

Thanks to the awareness-raising campaigns, everyone now knows the importance of clean containers and good hygiene.



Healthy children make happy children. And clean drinking water is the basis for good health.

Better for the children

Mr Mamadou Konaté, head of Kandougou village, has seen many benefits since the installation of the water points. The time saved for children has improved school attendance. "You see the children here today only because it is school holidays, otherwise they are studying." As well as less time spent collecting water, the fact that children suffer less from water-borne diseases is likely to have been a factor in the sharp increase in school attendance after the installation of water points.

"Fewer children die from accidents as well," says Mr Konaté. Before, when hauling buckets up on a rope from the edge of a deep well, children could lose their footing and fall, especially in the rainy season when the ground was muddy. "But now we have enclosed water points; what would happen every year can now never occur again."

Fruit, vegetables and livestock

He has seen other changes too, and ones that were not immediately expected from the project. People keep more animals now that they have access to water, and the animals are healthier. The availability of water and time has also led to the creation of small gardens and more tree planting in and around homesteads, improving the land and providing new resources. And more livestock, vegetables and more fruit must improve family food security, too.

Mr Konaté sums up the general feeling in the village: "We don't know how to thank you for this help. The people, especially the young and the old, are so grateful. The water points have made such a great change in our lives. Even at midnight people can come to the well to get water if they have run out. We are happy now."

“Water associations

bring a greater awareness of
water management issues.

— Mr Ko, General Secretary of Orodara Municipality

Water users' associations

In other parts of the world, water points are privately owned, with the owner setting the price per litre, which can be out of reach for the poorest people. Others are state owned, often through municipalities or local government; these often experience administrative and technical problems. The most effective management system is usually local water users' associations, and these were introduced to Kenedougou. These have been a major factor behind the success of this project.

A committee oversees each water point, and nominates a person to collect and record payments from users. A number of committees are combined to form a water users' association at the village level. Associations set an affordable annual charge for access to water – independent of the amount of water used. Household fees tend to be around CFA2500–5000 (US\$5–10) per year, although they can be lower. Children get water for free.

All payments go to the water user association's account, reserved solely to cover repairs. When a pump breaks, which may happen once or twice in a year, a technician is called. Technicians charge for transport and a set fee for opening the well, before providing an estimate for the

cost of repairs. Generally, water users' fees cover all minor repairs, but when a large repair would cost more than the reserves in the association's bank account, the association asks for support. The associations also benefit from technical assistance from the Regional Directorate for Water Resources, and from an annual subsidy from the government for the procurement of spare parts.

According to Mr Ahmed Lassina Konaté, president of the Bandougou village water users' association, the president, secretary and treasurer are chosen by members and perform their functions voluntarily. He calls regular meetings, and other meetings if there are problems to resolve. The main issue is what to do when people say they cannot pay. But there have been no exemptions and all issues are settled eventually; it is just a question of repeating the importance of paying for the whole community.

The local government tries not to be directly involved in how the water users' associations operate and the decisions they take. However, it does keep an eye on the prices being set, and whether these are affordable for everyone. They also help to identify technicians to undertake repair work, and act as a neutral intermediary to resolve any conflicts.

Building on past lessons

The Government of Burkina Faso and IsDB have worked together for more than 30 years to improve access to drinking water supplies. The initial project (1984–1992) saw 599 water points constructed; the second (1994–1998) saw a further 650 water points constructed in different provinces. IsDB contributed around US\$10 million to these.

But not everything went smoothly in past projects, and an appraisal in 2001 revealed valuable lessons. For example, many pumps had fallen into disrepair. And if they broke, they stayed broken, due to a shortage of trained technicians, spare parts and money to pay for maintenance and repair. Health issues were also still a problem in some areas, even where water pumps were working.

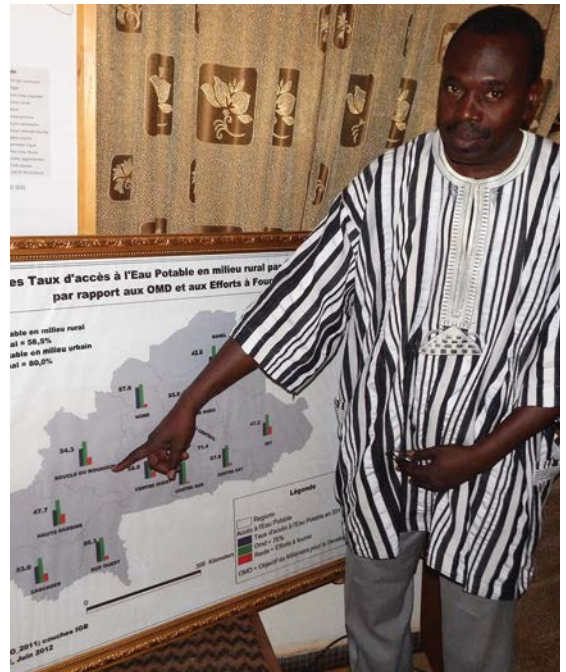
This project in Kenedougou succeeded largely because these lessons were heeded during project design and implementation. In response, this project included:

- ◆ A widespread public-awareness campaign on water hygiene, water conservation and wise management
- ◆ The transfer of management and financial sustainability of the water points to local communities
- ◆ Development of private-sector services to undertake maintenance and repairs.

The project used only local contractors, rather than companies from overseas, to build local capacity. Furthermore, the call for tenders was limited to only four pump types, which had already been tried and tested in the region.

Success factors

- **Government commitment:** The need for clean drinking water is fundamental, and the Government of Burkina Faso places a high priority on achieving this for its people.
- **Sound implementation:** The project was well implemented thanks to the solid experience gained by the executing agency, the General Directorate for Water Resources, the good capacity of the selected contractors, and close follow-up by the Regional Directorate.
- **Village water associations:** Transferring responsibility to local communities was a key component of this project, and one that made it stand out. It appears that this, more than any other factor, has contributed to the long-term maintenance of the water points.
- **Public-private partnerships:** The role of trained local mechanics in supporting the village water associations, and local contractors for construction and larger repairs working alongside government technicians, has also played a key role in keeping the water points working.



Mr Jean Marcel Oulé, Regional Director of the Hauts Bassins Regional Directorate, points out the provinces where access to clean drinking water remains below the national average.

Challenges and ways forward

Despite the project's overall success, there are some remaining issues. At present, there is no regular inspection of water quality (and healthiness) from the new water points. According to the Regional Directorate, laboratories lack the reagents needed to undertake physico-chemical and bacteriological analyses.

Access to clean drinking water in the whole of Kenedougou Province (and not just the project area) had increased to 47.8 per cent by 2011, but three years later it had increased only one percentage point further, to 48.8 per cent. This is below the national average of 64 per cent and far from the MDG target of 76 per cent by the end of 2015. There are calls for more financial support and more help to increase the capacity of businesses constructing water points. There is also a clear need for more awareness-raising to establish water users' associations as the best means to guarantee the supply of water in the long term.

The challenges remain, but Burkina Faso is advancing towards them and communities are learning as they go – and support from partners like IsDB will continue to play a vital role.



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The impacts this project has had on children have been the most significant. Not only has their health improved greatly, but there have been many other benefits such as higher school attendance. These children have many more opportunities in the future thanks to clean drinking water.

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